

Rural phone penetration rising in China

November 28 2005

China's Ministry of Information Industry said Sunday that the telephone penetration rate in the countryside had reached 96 percent, state-run media reported.

The announcement was made at a rural telephone conference involving vice premier Huang Ju. He congratulated the ministry for its work bringing phone access to 49,000 administrative villages

The village is the basic organizational unit in the Chinese countryside. There are two types: "natural" referring to genuine villages; "administrative" is a bureaucratic entity for smaller and scattered rural groups lumped together for government management purposes.

Huang, who ranks sixth in the Communist Party hierarchy, said China had entered "a crucial period of building up a well-off society in an all-round way" and that a recent plenum had put issues relating to agriculture, rural areas and farmers on the top of its work agenda.

The vice premier said accelerating the pace of rural communication infrastructure was one of the measures to solve problems in the countryside, adding it was an important responsibility for provincial and local government and an obligation for communication departments.

"Telephone use will help farmers broaden their horizons and have easier access to information" state-run media quoted Huang as saying. Xinhua reported the vice minister spoke on the phone with a farmer in Ansai county in northwestern China's Shaanxi Province. Huang asked for

details about local economic development and living standards.

Analysts note improved rural communications for better flows of information is a double-edged sword for the Chinese regime. In theory it allows the central leadership to know what's happening at the grassroots level. Conversely, it will enable people in the countryside with unresolved problems to connect and organize in ways that challenge local, provincial and ultimately the national government.

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